**Considering Triathlon?**

Tessa Glover, WNT Sports Massage Therapist interviews triathlete, Alicja Furmanczyk, (member of Windrush Triathlon club) about her training and motivation.

**Why did you choose triathlon? Why not just swimming, cycling or running?**

Triathlon was just something different to what I had done before, and an opportunity to do all three sports at once. I still do ‘one sport only’ events but with triathlon I find I’m under less pressure to match the pace of competitors around me - apart from the swim everyone starts at different times and goes about at a different pace.

**Which sport do you find the most challenging and why?**

It’s by far swimming. I’m a runner first and foremost, I love cycling but as much as I love swimming I’m just not a good swimmer, no matter how hard I try to improve my technique. I’m probably not patient enough. With swimming you always need to plan what time to go to the pool to get the most of your swim - it’s not as flexible as running or cycling which I can do anytime.

**I know you work full time so how many hours training do you do a week for each sport?**

It varies. Currently I’m training more than I have ever done. It’s typically up to 15 hours a week, occasionally a bit more if I do a very long cycle, a bit less when I’m having an easy tapering week. I also count my Pilates or strength & conditioning exercise into my training schedule. It all takes time after all.

**How do you find the motivation to get up and go for a 7am swim in cold water instead of staying in bed with a cup of tea?**

It’s definitely easier to train in the summer when it’s bright in the morning, and I wake up naturally at about 6am anyway... but I don’t always train in the morning and have days off when I have a ‘lie in’ - get up at 7.30am! With my job I often finish late, so mornings are more practical: it’s done and I’m set for the day. Motivation wise, I thrive on accomplishing goals so I think that’s part of it too - mentally I just tick off something on my to do list. And there are the endorphins afterwards. No matter how hard it is to start, when I finish I’m just full of positive energy!

**Does belonging to a triathlon club push you to enter more challenging competitions than you would probably do left to your own devices?**

Definitely. I don’t think I would have signed up for a full Ironman race if I hadn’t done the middle distance (equivalent to half Ironman) with Windrush last year. I wouldn’t have signed up for the middle distance if I hadn’t been encouraged by the club. So it’s all a chain reaction!

**Are you competitive?**

I’d love to say no but I know I am... but not in a bad way! It’s mostly about being competitive with myself and accomplishing my own goals rather than goals set up by someone else. I don’t think I would ever take up triathlon or any other sport competitively though (assuming I was very good at it!) - I would immediately lose interest and the joy of running, cycling and swimming, and that’s very important to me.

**You mentioned that you are entering your first Iron Man triathlon this summer, how did you come to make that decision?**

I did my first ever half middle distance last summer and when I finished I felt I still had some energy left... so I thought I should sign up for an even longer race... I also wanted to do something that will push me out of my comfort zone and be the ultimate event I would ever aspire to, which I believe Ironman to be!

**What impact does this amount of training have on your mental state and social life?**

A tricky one. Training overall makes me happy but with all honestly, at times, the amount of training and the fact I have to stick to a plan can be taxing. I do make sure I have proper rest. I do struggle sometimes with maneuvering my need to train (and rest & recovery time) with ‘normal life’ but also with some deeply ingrained societal expectations of what I should be really doing and focusing on (whether it’s my parents asking about grandchildren that they do not have or my friends questioning why I don’t want to go out as much). But I also keep trying to find ways of incorporating my friends into my training life, e.g. when going for a long run or cycle and visiting them afterwards, eating their food!

**How do you look after your body to make sure you are in peak condition and injury free?**

I never sacrifice a good night’s sleep. I also try to listen to my body, even if that means missing out on a training session... if my body tells me I need rest, then that’s what I do. I would definitely prioritise being injury free over my race performance. I am terrified of getting injured so I do a lot of ‘pre-hab’: strength and conditioning exercises, stretching, Pilates and I use foam roller and a massage ball on a regular basis. In fact, I go as far as to bring the ball to work sometimes (time is precious!). I also try to have a sport massage once a month and time it well before or after my races. Fingers crossed I’m doing the right things!

**How much has sports massage helped you during your training as a triathlete?**

A lot. A couple of years ago I had an injury whilst training for a marathon, and I strongly believe that part of the problem was that I didn’t have a sports massage on a regular basis, no trusted professional to tell me about my muscle imbalances and weaknesses, and how to work on those. I know treat sport massage as part of my routine and a treat too!

**Bonus question:**

What is the most common question that you are asked about triathlon? Have I asked it?

    Yes! Why do I do it to myself 

