



Lloyd Upsdell

Lloyd is a 100m and 200m sprinter who won two gold medals at the Sydney Paralympics in 2000, and has held the world record in both distances, as well as four World Championship gold medals and three European Championship gold medals. He has also played rugby at county level for Suffolk.

‘When I was born, my lungs collapsed, which resulted in cerebral palsy. I couldn’t give you the medical terminology, but it means that my right leg doesn’t work properly. I walked quite late, but my parents made up for it by talking to me constantly, so that by the time I was 18 months old I could hold a proper conversation!

‘My interest in sport started quite young – in fact, I’ve always been quite sporty. I needed some physiotherapy when I was about six, and so I ended up going to a disabled sports club called the Dovedale Flyers. There were seven or eight of us there and we’d have a good laugh together, doing things like going to the National Athletics Championships at Stoke Mandeville. Then when I was 15 I was spotted by one of the Great Britain coaches and invited to run in the Cerebral Palsy National Championships, and I won both my races. It was a strange experience – I didn’t own any specialist kit, so I ran in my baggy shorts

and trainers, whereas everyone else had all-in-ones and running spikes. So then I was entered into the World Championships. But I got two gold medals. It all happened in such a short space of time – it was an amazing eight weeks.

‘I carried on playing rugby and running, but I never really considered athletics as a career. Then in 1998, National Lottery funding for Paralympic athletes came in, which made a big difference. I started to do some events and I qualified to go to the Paralympics in Sydney in 2000. Being out there was an amazing four weeks – I won two gold medals for the 100 and 200 metres, and broke two world records. It was a fantastically well organised, absolutely brilliant Paralympic games, and a very surreal experience for me. I was only 17. It sounds big headed, but I knew I was the fastest so I just turned up, put my spikes on, and ran. I really enjoyed the whole thing, it was amazing. I did do loads of training, though. I went to

South Africa with my brother and slogged solidly for a month beforehand.

'I'm not the sort of person who dwells on problems, and I don't think there's anything I would particularly change. I never had to have help or additional carers, and I went to a mainstream school. It's a purely physical thing for me – my disability has never caused me any social problems or made me feel uncomfortable. And I wouldn't have done half the things I've done if it hadn't been for my cerebral palsy. If anything, it has made me tougher and more resilient.

'My advice to anyone facing similar challenges is "just do it". Just get out there, and do any sport you fancy trying. 2012 is going to offer so many opportunities – just look on the British Paralympic Association website www.paralympics.org.uk

'If I could change one thing, I'd create better access for disabled people, not just in sport but in all areas of life. I'd make sure they had the same opportunities and access that non-disabled people have.'

as long as it takes