

# Liz Yelling

Pulling your trainers on again just two weeks after giving birth may not seem like everyone's idea of fun, but for Olympic marathon runner Liz Yelling it couldn't come a day too soon. Sportsister's Louise Hudson caught up with Liz to hear about her marathon comeback following the birth of her first child Ruby.

"I started running when I was nine and I almost don't know any different. I have this burning passion for running and I can't explain it, running is in my blood." As I hear the Commonwealth bronze medallist describing her passion for the sport she has chosen to build a life around, I'm struck with a déjà-vu feeling back to a recent interview with fellow marathon runner Paula Radcliffe.

The comparisons between the two are inevitable – they first met aged 11 at a running club, became friends and were training partners for many years under coach Alex Stanton. And both have a passion and drive for the sport that's beyond admirable.

One of the lasting images for me of the Beijing Olympics is Liz comforting Paula at the end of the marathon as the world record holder collapsed in tears following an agonisingly painful last 11 miles. But Paula wasn't the only one who had battled her way through the 26 miles that day.

On her blog Liz describes it as the day she bit the tarmac. It was certainly one of the toughest experiences of her running career. Getting to the start line fit is half the battle of marathon running – as Paula knows only too well. But for Liz the preparations had gone perfectly; "In the build up to the race my preparation had been the best ever. Everything had gone right and to plan, in most cases even better than I could possibly have hoped for..."

The race started well but just before the 10 mile mark she got kicked from behind and fell straight to the ground. "I felt no pain at the time, rolling across my back and quickly up on my feet again. Looking back I know now this was the adrenaline concealing the pain. Two more miles and my elbow ached when I reached for my drinks bottle. I didn't mind, my arm would not really affect my race. Then a searing pain in my ribs gradually got worse and worse as the kilometres ticked past.

"By 25k into the race I had real trouble breathing. I was unable to take in a full breath and I was taking quicker shallow breaths to minimise the pain in my side. It felt as though I was running on one lung, as if I was running with a belt tied around my chest.

"It was the most frustrating 16 miles of my running life. I hadn't trained so hard for this. I wanted the pain. I was ready for the suffering. I really wanted to feel the intense hurt of the Olympic marathon. Just not like this.

"I was in great shape - the best of my life. I had controlled all the elements I could control to be fit and ready for this moment. I was really ready to race."

But for Liz the Olympic glory wasn't to be. So how do you go about picking yourself up after such a bitter disappointment? Years of training go into an Olympic appearance, and for a cruel twist of fate to undo all that hard work must have been heartbreaking.

"It is a huge battle and I don't know that I will be able to get it all right again because that is something about the challenge of the marathon, you never know what is going to happen.

"But that is what I thrive on. The journey that I took to Beijing showed me what was possible and I found a training plan that worked for me. I found a way that I could prepare that meant I would be in the best shape I have ever been in and I know I can do that again, given the right opportunity. Hopefully I will create those opportunities for myself again and run a faster marathon than I have ever done.

**"I feel like I am not done in my running, I feel like I have more to prove and that's what the next couple of years are about....proving to myself that I can run faster."**

It seems that Ruby came along at just the right time. And with a flurry of new mum's making headlines in the sporting world, it's been argued that having a child can give some athletes that extra edge. Kim Clijsters' well-documented comeback winning the US Open on a wild card entry after taking time out to have daughter Jada and Scot Catriona Matthew who won the British Open just eleven weeks after giving birth to her second daughter are two great examples.



"I think partly it is to do with the rest that you get," Liz tells me. "It reminds you how much your sport means to you and how much you love it. I think that can give you a real injection of enthusiasm and motivation.

**"I feel refreshed now and can really tackle it head on. I think having a child gives you great perspective as well. It makes you more aware of your own body and how to manage things around you.**

"Sometimes as an elite performer you become very selfish and I think having Ruby made me think of other things outside of running, which is good as a sports person."

So has she been sharing tips with other marathon running new mums?

"Paula (Radcliffe) got back into her running far quicker than I did and I think if I have taken anything from what she has done it is to try and avoid injury. She was injured a month after she gave birth and I just wanted to avoid that.

"She has spoken to me and said it takes a while for your body to feel like it's all back together again. She said it probably took her a year before she felt like everything was right again. That is really great advice for me because I don't want to go and hammer my body and end up not feeling right."

During her pregnancy Liz was diagnosed with placenta previa, where the placenta lies unusually low in the uterus. This meant she was unable to run throughout the majority of her pregnancy and it spelled the biggest break from running she has ever had. Instead she walked and cycled to maintain some fitness.

"I had two weeks totally off exercise after giving birth and then I did two weeks of just walking every other day just to ease myself back into a routine again. I then started long walking because I hadn't run for eight months. I was extremely unfit so I had to take it quite slowly and I just gradually built up.

"I was able to run after about three to six weeks for about half an hour and then I just built a frequency of running up from that point.

"Initially it was difficult to create a routine again because all of a sudden I had another person to look after. But Martin (her husband and ironman triathlete) and myself are adjusting our lives so we can juggle and balance things.

"It has got easier, the more grown up Ruby has got the more predictable she has become so I feel more comfortable leaving her and getting out for my run.

"I haven't put any pressure on myself to get back in to races within three months. I really wanted to enjoy the time and be really progressive with my training. And make sure I don't get injured or ill.

"Ruby has been coming out with us in the Baby Jogger which is really easy to push. Martin won't let me push her now because he is worried I will get injured but he pushes her all the time."

As the training miles start to clock up again Liz is turning her attention to the racing season ahead. Three half marathons (Wokingham, Reading and Silverstone) will kick things off followed by the Edinburgh marathon in May.

"I am doing Edinburgh because it is lower key than London. There's just less pressure for me that way. My first marathon back won't be the best one so I think if I can use it as part of my training and building up strength then kind of layer up the training for the autumn.

"Hopefully I will have a better crack at Chicago (in October). I have raced there before and it's a flat and fast course and it will give me the best opportunity to get a good time under my belt."

Liz, like many of Britain's top athletes including world champions Beth Tweddle and Jessica Ennis, has decided not to compete at this year's Commonwealth Games in India. She feels the political situation in the region is too unstable and she didn't want her family to travel out there.

"It is a shame because it's a really good event. It is a great opportunity and a great spring board for a lot of people to experience an event on that scale and then use that to practice for the Olympics in 2012. Maybe my absence will give other people opportunities to compete at that level and that's a good thing."

## Credits:

**Styling:** Danielle Sellwood

**Photography:** Sean Malyon [www.seanmalyon.co.uk](http://www.seanmalyon.co.uk)

**Hair and make-up:** Abigail Burgoyne using MAC cosmetics and Jemma Kidd hair products.

**Liz is wearing:**

**Shot on location at:** The Sandbanks Hotel, Poole Dorset. Located on a Blue Flag beach with seven miles of golden sand, the hotel is the perfect holiday destination for watersports, family fun or just relaxing by the sea. The hotel has its own Watersports Academy. [www.sandbankshotel.co.uk](http://www.sandbankshotel.co.uk)

For more information about Liz, her coaching services and training workshops see [www.lizyelling.com](http://www.lizyelling.com)

